

VZCZCXRO7067  
OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHML #2727/01 3510549  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 160549Z DEC 08  
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2693  
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANILA 002727

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MTS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/15/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KISL](#) [RP](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND DEFENSE SECRETARY DISCUSS SECURITY  
IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES

REF: MANILA 2677

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: In a December 15 private breakfast with the Ambassador, Philippine Secretary of National Defense Gilberto Teodoro discussed the security situation in the southern Philippines and the discipline the Armed Forces of the Philippines are showing in the face of continued clashes with terrorist groups and rogue Moro Islamic Liberation Front elements. Teodoro emphasized the success the Philippine military was having against rogue MILF commands in Mindanao, whose attacks against civilians and government forces in August displaced thousands and disrupted the ceasefire between the government and MILF. At the same time, Teodoro noted that a series of armed encounters on Basilan stem from deeply rooted problems with local governance on the island that will require additional attention from the government to resolve. On Jolo island, Teodoro said the Philippine Marines were performing well there and raised this year's rise in drug seizures as a potential trend in terrorist financing that bore watching. Commenting on the political situation, Teodoro said the Philippine military was behaving professionally, and that he was convinced the Armed Forces would stay out of politics. Teodoro voiced his approval of Undersecretary Rafael Seguis being named the new head of the government's peace panel and said that President Arroyo was eager to announce a resumption of talks with the MILF. Teodoro thanked the Ambassador for USG disaster relief over the last year and said that the Philippines was working to host a successful ASEAN Regional Forum disaster relief exercise next May. END SUMMARY.

-----  
AFP FOCUSED ON MISSION, RESPECTING HUMAN RIGHTS  
-----

2. (C) During breakfast with the Ambassador on December 15, Philippine Secretary of National Defense Gilberto Teodoro lauded the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) professional performance in central Mindanao, saying military forces were continuing to conduct targeted operations against rogue MILF commanders, while maintaining discipline and avoiding civilian casualties. Teodoro clearly was pleased with the AFP's ability to restore order to the areas affected by violence, while making a deliberate effort to protect civilians. Noting that recent polling showed the AFP as having moved from negative to positive in terms of public perception, the Ambassador raised the issue of human rights and extrajudicial killings (EJKs) with Teodoro, emphasizing the importance of eliminating any EJKs and maintaining the support of the population by promoting a military that fully respects human rights. Teodoro agreed that it was imperative to continue improvements, stressing he personally had visited detainees in AFP custody and that they were being treated

well.

-----  
PEACE PROCESS  
-----

13. (C) On the stalled peace process with the MILF, Teodoro told the Ambassador that the recent appointment of Department of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Rafael Seguis as the government's chief negotiator was a wise choice and that President Arroyo was eager to announce the resumption of peace talks, as soon as conditions were right. While observing that President Arroyo is committed to restarting peace negotiations with MILF leadership, Teodoro questioned the utility of negotiations when MILF leadership could not control its own commanders. The Ambassador emphasized the need to end the fighting so that tens of thousands of displaced persons could return to their homes.

-----  
LACK OF GOVERNANCE ON BASILAN  
-----

14. (C) Teodoro voiced his concern that the lack of governance on Basilan island is the root of the recent clashes between the AFP and lawless elements that "hide behind the MILF so they can't be touched." Discussing December 7 engagements between the AFP and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) members on Basilan that killed and wounded dozens (reftel), Teodoro said that weak and ineffective local government is contributing to a situation that allows criminals and terrorists on the island to conduct frequent

MANILA 00002727 002 OF 003

kidnappings and attack government groups. Teodoro thanked the Ambassador for U.S. support, saying it had been "just right, low key, and off the front lines," -- a reference to U.S. assistance in evaluating intelligence before the offensive and evacuating wounded soldiers from the area. The Ambassador agreed that Basilan still was in need of USG development assistance to strengthen communities and suggested to Teodoro that a renewed focus on infrastructure projects from the Philippine government would pay great dividends in reducing support for the ASG.

-----  
JOLO: DRUGS A CONCERN  
-----

15. (C) Turning to Jolo island, Teodoro said the Marines under Major General Juancho Sabban had been doing a good job keeping terrorists off balance, despite recent ambushes and sporadic attacks by a handful of high value individuals on the island. The Ambassador congratulated Teodoro on a December 7 strike (reftel) against a known ASG camp that disrupted terrorist operations on Jolo. Teodoro highlighted a November 10 discovery of a large marijuana plantation on Jolo, the fourth significant seizure of marijuana on Jolo and in surrounding waters, as an example of increasing cooperation between military and law enforcement to interdict a potential source of funding for terrorists. The Ambassador said that the USG was following the issue of drug production and trafficking in the southern Philippines closely and would continue to provide assistance to Philippine authorities.

-----  
AFP COMMITTED TO STAYING OUT OF POLITICS  
-----

16. (C) Teodoro acknowledged that the military was still receiving overtures from political naysayers to flex its muscle in the ongoing struggle between President Arroyo and the opposition. However, he emphasized that the AFP was committed to remaining out of politics and that Chief of the Armed Forces General Yano had assured him of the military's nonpartisan stance. Teodoro said that, as in the past,

certain "troublemakers" have periodically attempted to capitalize on dissatisfaction within the military over personnel issues, but he said the focus on military reform had addressed many of these underlying inequities, resulting in higher morale among the troops and firm support for President Arroyo.

-----  
DISASTER RELIEF  
-----

17. (C) With this year's typhoon season ending, Secretary Teodoro said he thought U.S.-Philippine cooperation on disaster relief had gone very well in 2008 and that he hoped the USG could enhance its efforts next year. The Ambassador said the U.S. was always glad to provide assistance when possible, and stressed that a more streamlined process for aircraft and ship clearances would facilitate not only U.S. disaster relief operations in the Philippines, but provide greater flexibility for U.S. ships and aircraft involved in bilateral activities. Teodoro said his team would be working closely with the Embassy to make the process easier for everyone. On Philippine disaster relief capabilities, Teodoro said capabilities have increased, most notably with the creation of a new National Disaster Coordinating Council operations center, which Teodoro was inaugurating later in the day. Teodoro also said that planning for the ASEAN Regional Forum disaster relief exercise to be held in the Philippines in May 2009 was progressing well and that he expected involvement from a wide range of ASEAN nations.

-----  
COMMENT  
-----

18. (C) A potential presidential candidate in 2010, Teodoro is an active Defense Secretary. He is also a hawk on Mindanao, supporting targeted military action in the Sulu Archipelago and Central Mindanao. Teodoro questions the value of talks at this stage with the MILF, but respects President Arroyo's desire to return to negotiations. As with several cabinet members, Teodoro believes Malaysia has overplayed its hand as the facilitator of the MILF negotiations. We continue to keep Philippine officials focused on military action against ASG and Jemaah Islamiyah

MANILA 00002727 003 OF 003

terrorists, while encouraging them to end the fighting with rogue MILF commands in Central Mindanao, which has displaced tens of thousands of people.  
KENNEY